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Institute of the Arts



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GRADUATE DIPLOMA of ART
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REPORT

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OF THE GRADUATE DIPLOMA OF ART

ABSTRACT

Ceramic Sculpture: A body of large ceramic sculpture which explores the technical limitations of the medium and attempts to find practical methods for making large scale ceramic work in components. A study taking the form of an exhibition of sculptures exhibited at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from March 4 to 15, 1997 which comprises the outcome of the studio practice component, together with the report which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.

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I would also like to thank Nigel Lendon and my supervisors Hiroe Swen and Alan Watt.

To all the people I drank coffee with.....good morning/good afternoon!

A big thanks to my mother for typing this text for me.

Thanks to my brother and everyone who helped me lift things and carry things about.

Thanks to the staff members, and students who made the 'Japan trip' so informative and enjoyable.

To all the people I drank sake with.....Kanpai!

INTRODUCTION

This report is a visual and written record of twelve months work and hopefully, will provide the reader with a clear impression of the technical and mental process which resulted in the body of work seen here. The foundations for this body of work were laid in Melbourne in 1994 when I began to work on the theme of support. I was both painting and making small sculptures; drawing from the industrial environment around me for inspiration.

Many important changes occurred in Melbourne. The truss became a symbol for support / the Architectonic forms became a metaphor for people. In a way, my work shifted from the obvious to the metaphoric. The metaphoric aspect of my work has since become stronger and more complicated.

Although I enjoyed making the small sculptures in Melbourne, I always wanted to see them on a larger scale. This Post-Graduate year of study was an opportunity to develop techniques for making large scale work and to further develop my, as yet, new ideas.

WORK PROPOSAL

Theoretical Background:

My work is a reflection of my observations of Humanity and the way in which people react to one another, support is a major theme in my work and is an important consideration in the design of my sculpture. Many of these pieces are made from three or more elements which must be joined together in order to stand upright. Each piece supports the others and together they form a more complex structure. In some pieces this is metaphoric of co-operation on a societal scale and in others it may be on a more personal level. I also have plans to comment on the individual in Society.

I am attempting to express these ideas in a non literal manner in that I do not use the figure in my work. My sculpture is about Human concerns, although it is quite de-humanised in form. The Architectonic forms I use in my work are a metaphor for people.

Aesthetic Influences:

I have always been drawn to the strong linear and monumental nature of Architecture. Some artists who interest me are:

Rodchenko
Kazimir Malévich
Bruce Beasley

The solidity and complexity of the bronze sculptures of Bruce Beasley have been major influences in my work. More recently I have been looking at the plaster sculptures of Kazimir Malévich and the constructivist paintings of Rodchenko. I am particularly interested in the negative space in Rodchenko's work and the intersection of forms in the case of Malévich and Bruce Beasley. Negative space and balance are major concerns in my work, as is the intersection of forms.

Work Methods:

My body of work will be a series of handbuilt pieces and smaller bronzes. The handbuilt pieces will be coil built and sawdust blackfired with reduction glazes. I would like to express sculptural ideas in bronze which are impossible with the physical limitations of clay. I am also interested in the contrast between the small bronze pieces and the monumental clay pieces.

Conceptual Basis

My work is an exploration of Humanity and, more recently, a critique of Western Culture. It stems directly from my own observations, experiences and reading from 1994 - 1996. I began this year (1996) with the theme of support; a further development of a theme which began in 1994. As my work progressed I began to explore different aspects of Humanity and my concepts moved beyond the theme of support. I began to look further away from personal experience, examining social structure and the workings of our society. Individual issues became less important. The individual seems to be a mere part of a much larger plan; part of the industrial machine. Eventually I arrived at western culture and the effect it has had on world culture.

“Danger of our culture: we belong to a time in which culture is in danger of being destroyed by the means of culture”. (Friedrich Nietzsche) (1)

The above quote appeared in Nietzsche's 'Human, All Too Human' 110 years ago; how prophetic it seems now. Western culture as we know it, began in Europe and was spread throughout the world during the colonialist expansion of European countries. Wherever Western culture has gone, indigenous cultures have been subjugated. lost their identity and been absorbed into its oppressive regime of capitalism and industrialisation..... or simply been annihilated. 'Modernise or Perish' is the order of the day; 'Westernise or Perish' may be a more accurate statement.

“Rooted in Middle-Eastern agricultural imperialism, fertilised by the blood of colonialistic destruction, and armed with unprecedented technological power and material wealth, the European-American empire is finally uprooting the last remnants of native cultures. The western world leaves no place on earth for the archaic world to survive”. (Robert Lawlor) (2)

America, however, is only a recent example. In the past, European countries such as England, France and Spain were responsible for the subjugation and in many cases, subsequent destruction of indigenous cultures.

The Environmental Question:

Technology.....that so called 'path to Utopia' on which so many dreams were built; that which came into being with the promise of making life easier. How ironic that it threatens to destroy us.

The Double Irony: What technology will save us from our technology?

There are two main reasons why science and technology have created such world-wide havoc; the more obvious of the two is 'industry'. In most cases destructive methods and practices have been retained in industry purely because of economics. It is cheaper to use fossil fuels. It is cheaper for big industry to pay their (pollution) fines than to dispose of waste in a responsible and environmentally sound manner. INDUSTRY PAYS TO POLLUTE! Environmental damage: this is western culture's Achilles' Heel. Unfortunately, it is not only western culture which suffers.

The second reason is 'overpopulation'. Technology of yesterday allowed our populations to grow too large for the land to support them so that now humanity is like a pestilence upon the earth. There are, quite simply, too many people in the world, but what are we to do about it? Birth control? I think perhaps that it is too late for birth control.

Christianity and Colonialism:

Where Western colonialists went, missionaries followed close on their heels. Christianity and colonialism worked together to achieve conquest of cultures. As the colonialists took to the native forests with their axes, so Christianity was like an axe blow to the beliefs of native people. Concepts such as heaven and hell, Satan and God, and the idea of sin had devastating effects on Indigenous cultures, their ancient laws and ways of life were suddenly in question! What arrogance! Such concepts as 'Hell-fire' and 'Eternal Damnation' cannot be sufficiently despised. Christianity rules by fear and guilt. Christianity is as guilty of crimes against humanity as Western culture.

The Missionaries met strong, natural and vibrant people and reduced them to mere Christians; sickened with guilt and fear of a vengeful God.

An axe head is shaped like a wedge: Christian moralities were wedged into Indigenous cultures and prised them from their once strong foundations. The now 'weakened' people were softened for the takeover by Western culture. Subjugated and forced into a foreign and alienating society, the besieged cultures were now ready to take on the religion of humility - they were ready to embrace Christianity. A people's strength lies in its laws and culture; take that away, and what have you left?

"The rule of power and the destruction of the innocent marked the entry of the Hebrews into the promised land. When the Hebrews went into Canaan to claim the land God had promised them, they slew those whom they found there and counted it not among their sins. God says to Moses about Og, the King of Bashan: "I have delivered him unto thy hand, and all his people and his land" so they smote him and his sons, and all his people until there was none left alive: and they possessed his land".

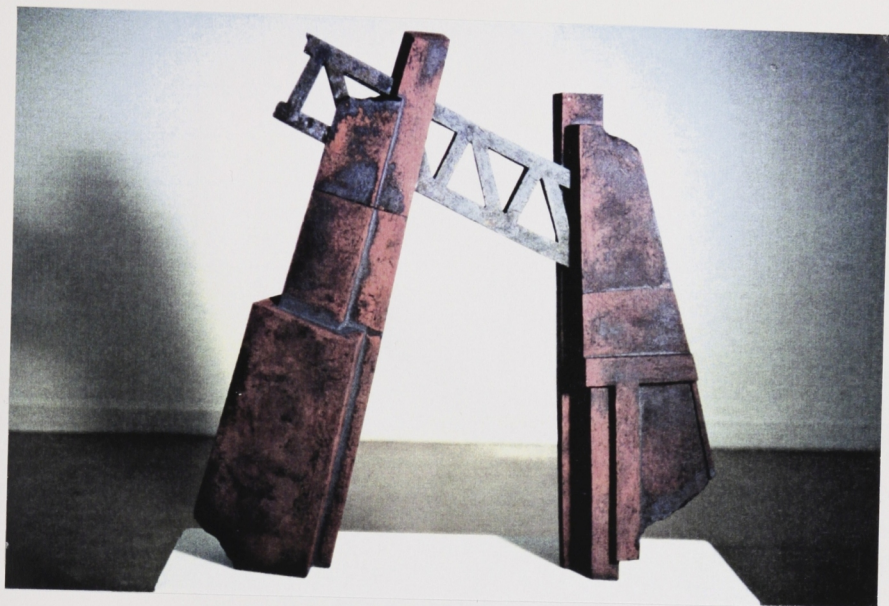
(Andrew Bard Schmookler: The Parable of the Tribes) (3)

Christianity and Paganism:

When Christianity reached Europe, there were still Pagan communities in which the Indigenous consciousness and nature worship were still alive. Unlike the Roman empire, which tolerated the Indigenous cultures of its conquered lands, Christianity single mindedly set out to destroy their beliefs. The 'conversion' of these cultures brought about the loss of the fundamental basis for an understanding of, and respect for nature. If these ideas had been allowed to survive in Europe, then perhaps science and technology would have been more 'earth-minded' and environmentally friendly.

The monotheistic regime of Christianity would allow no sacred (Earth) places and held no 'love of nature' in its doctrine. The Christian God, it seems, is so jealous he will not even tolerate our love of his handiwork!

THE WORK



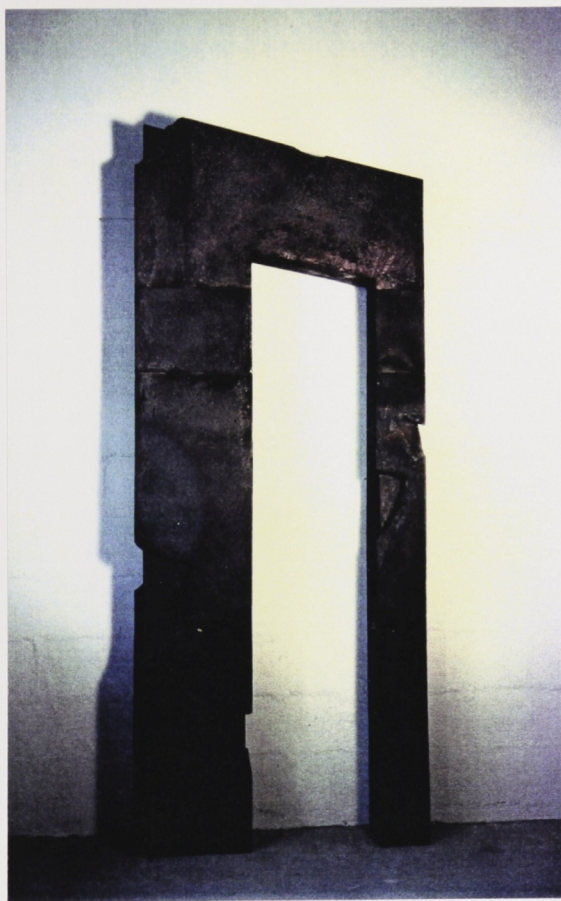
1. Dua I 1996
Handbuilt, Blackfired,
Copper Glazes. 114cm x 109cm

This piece was the starting point for this body of work. It was the first piece I made in 1996 and was an obvious continuation of the smaller (1994) pieces. As in the earlier pieces, it deals with the 'support' idea with the 'Truss' form and the two leaning pieces illustrating the idea of interdependence or cooperation.



2. Dua II 1996
Handbuilt, Blackfired
Copper Glazes. 123cm x 69.5cm

Two new metaphors were introduced into my work in this piece: The Arch as supporting structure, as well as the illusion of a harder inner core supporting a crumbling softer masonry structure. This is symbolic of an inner strength or psychological system of support. One half of the piece is more deteriorated than the other, giving the taller one the appearance of supporting it, this is metaphoric of help on a personal level, such as that given by friends and family.



3. Moment 1996
Handbuilt, Blackfired
Copper Glazes. 227cm x 93.5cm

"This long lane behind us: it goes on for an eternity. And that long lane ahead of us - that is another eternity. They are in opposition to one another, these paths, they abut on one another; and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is written above it:- Moment". (Friedrich Nietzsche) (4)

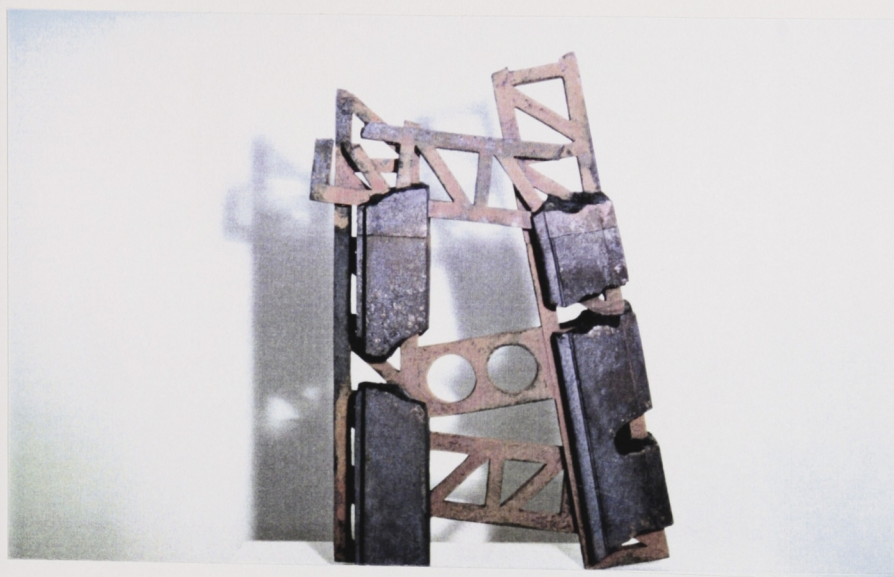
This piece deals with the same concerns as the one preceding it, though it is very different in style; it has a timeless quality about it. The above quote (as well as being a fascinating concept) seems to describe very eloquently, the sentiments I wished to evoke.



4. Facade 1996
Handbuilt, Paper-clay
Blackfired, Copper glazes. 150cm x 41.5cm

"An outgoing and peaceable disposition is like a three foot wall of crude rubber. Infinitely pliant, but inviolable". (Kobo Abé) (5)

With this piece I attempted to express the idea of the 'social mask'. The external appearance as opposed to the internal reality. Viewed from one side the piece appears to be robust and solid, giving it the appearance of monumental weight and strength. Viewed from the other side it is obviously hollow and the internal supporting structure can be clearly seen. Suddenly the illusion of strength and solidity are gone and the viewer is faced with the reality of the piece. People often seem very different when we first meet them, but upon closer inspection or when we get to know them better, we invariably discover the person behind the facade. More often than not, I suspect, we admire others only because we do not know them as well as ourselves..... do we really worship our 'heroes' and 'Gods' or merely the image they project?



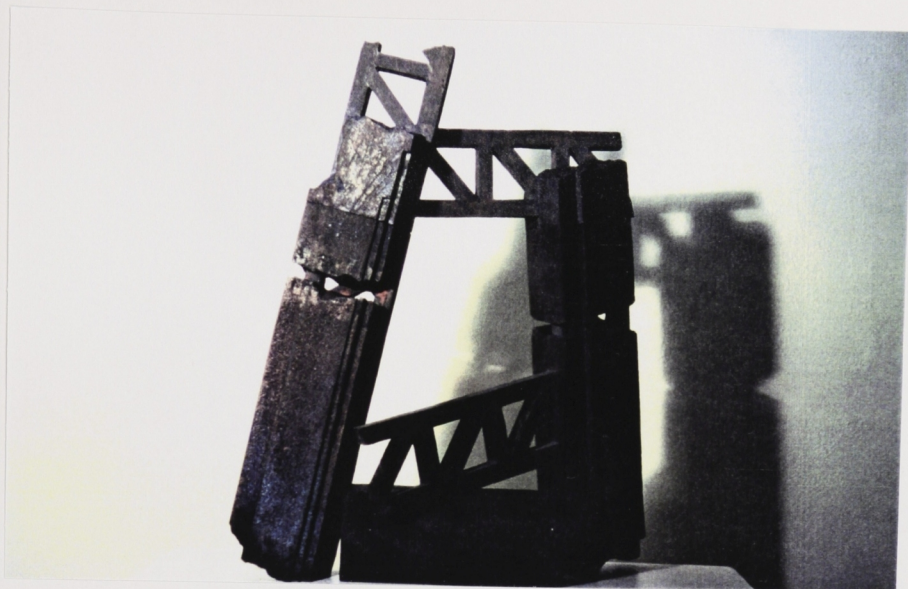
5. Semiotic 1996

Handbuilt, Paper-clay

Blackfired, Copper glazes. 112cm x 75cm

The fifth piece was made immediately after the ceramics conference and while still on the theme of support, the underlying meaning was of dialogue and the exchange of ideas. This may have been a subconscious reaction to the conference, although it was not my conscious intention at the time.

The support theme was further developed this time by having one half of the piece teetering on its edge and being supported entirely by the other more stable half. The negative space in this piece was just as important as the sculpture itself. This time the 'Truss' became the main part of the structure. I wanted to express the idea of crumbling masonry revealing a steel formwork; it was a process of exposing the bones of the piece.



6. Stepping Stone I 1996

Handbuilt, Paper-clay

Blackfired, Copper glazes. 107.5 cm x 99cm

A comment on Society and the class system. The two taller sections are both supported by a central horizontal piece on which they lean. The entire piece relies on the central core for its stability. The central core represents the working class; the two taller structures are the upper classes. The meaning here is obvious: The working class is a stepping stone for those who see themselves as the 'upper class'.

*"He who cannot obey himself will be commanded".
(Friedrich Nietzsche). (6)*



7. Stepping Stone II 1996

Handbuilt, Paper-clay

Blackfired, Copper glazes. 115.5cm x 99cm

As my ideas progressed I began to comment on my ideas of Western Culture and it's effect on the rest of the world. It was the beginning of a new idea and a somewhat different approach to my work. 'Stepping Stone' is dedicated to all the little countries and indigenous cultures who were subjugated during the colonialist expansion of European Nations such as England, Spain and France, and to the Americanization of many countries today.



Symbolism:

1. The triangle symbolises the directions of movement taken by the European countries during their colonialist expansion. The raised circle in the middle represents their general point of origin - Europe.
2. The Rune-like symbols represent an alien culture with its script and language, and the way it may have been seen by the culture it came into contact with. It was essential that these symbols be unrecognisable and fictional, in that they do not belong to any existing alphabet. These symbols are foreign to any viewer.



8. Balance of Power 1996

Handbuilt, Paper-clay

Copper Glazes. 306.1cm x 58cm

This sculpture is an expression of my views of western culture, it's apparent strengths and hidden weaknesses. Instability, Colonialism and Christianity were the themes dealt with here. It has the appearance of an unstable stack of blocks, covered with crumbling masonry. This is metaphoric of instability and of the piecing together of western culture from numerous other cultures / a patchwork conglomeration in a sense. The industrial nature of western countries has created the instability this piece attempts to express. Western culture appears to be very strong; at first glance it appears to be a new 'Imperial Romanum', but all is not as it seems. The mock steel plates and bolts are a further elaboration on the idea that it is in danger of collapse and is being patched up (support). The steel plates and bolts also symbolise the industry upon which western culture relies.

I have also incorporated found objects into this sculpture such as the (once round) object which has been exposed by erosion and decay. Elements such as this are an echo of past history and the industrial revolution. The axe head is a powerful symbol with more than one meaning:

1. It symbolises Christianity and the role it played in colonialist expansion :- The wedge of Christian moralities.
2. The destruction of native forests to support the ever increasing material appetites of growing industrial countries.
3. The axe was a valuable commodity for trade in the colonial era, for example, in New Zealand axes were traded to the Maori people in exchange for land.
4. Finally, the axe could be seen as a metaphor for violence and war.



Work in progress: shown before firing and assembly.

WORKING METHOD:

Coil Building:

The greater part of my work was coil built as this is a strong and reliable method of construction. The 'truss' form was press moulded as a uniformity of size and shape was desirable; press moulding is also a time saving technique. Very few slabs were used in my work as I feel that they increase the risk of cracking by adding more joins to the structure.

In the later part of the year, when my concepts developed and changed, I began to make and use more press moulds as my work changed with them. With the two pieces:- 'Stepping Stone' and 'Balance of Power', I moved away from the earlier minimalist feel and incorporated more detail into the surfaces. The earlier pieces had large flat planar surfaces and I relied on the effects of the glazes and firing to enhance them; inevitably I was lured by their potential and explored relief.

Components:

Making the work in several components had its pros and cons. It was advantageous in that I could make large scale sculpture which was relatively easy to transport to the kiln and the kiln dimensions did not limit the size of the finished pieces. The visible joins however, were often a difficult problem which eluded an easy solution. I finally solved this 'conundrum' in 'Balance of Power', when I hid the joins in the relief.

The Joins: To ensure that the two halves of the join did not stick together when I coiled them, I painted a thin layer of talc slip (talc and water) onto the bottom half of the join. When the next coil was laid down it did not stick to the talc layer; the result was a tight fit, even after firing. The joins were designed in such a way that they slotted into each other, thus eliminating the need for metal pins and/or adhesive. Using this method also allowed me to retain the portability of the pieces.

Scale:- One of my main aims this year was to make large scale ceramic sculpture which was nonetheless portable, relatively light, and capable of disassembly and reassembly. I faced the technical problem of wanting to make large 'visually heavy' sculpture which are easy to transport and assemble in situ. It is my eventual aim to make commission work, so transportation will be an important factor.

There are many advantages in making ceramic work which is hollow, not the least of which is its ability to be fired evenly and without incident. If I were to make my work solid it would require an enormous amount of materials and would have to be fired for a far greater length of time; the risk of loss would also be far greater.

Clay Bodies:- Since my intention was to make large scale work, it was therefore necessary to mix suitable clay bodies to build it. I required a clay body which was highly resistant to thermal shock, as light as possible, and with a low risk of cracking. Other factors taken into consideration were:

- It's strength in the dry state.
- Percentage of shrinkage/both in the wet to dry state and during firing.

It was extremely important that the clay had a low shrinkage rate during firing as the arch forms I was making would have undergone considerable stress from 700° - 1000°C when the clay body is in the crucial stage of vitrification / lowering the shrinkage lessened the likelihood of stress fractures.

To the first batch of clay, I added 115 Kilograms of Grog to mix 400 kilograms of clay; this made the clay extremely short and quite difficult to use. I had no cracking and very little shrinkage however, which was a positive aspect. With so much Grog in the clay, it was extremely heavy, creating difficulties with moving sections of work to the kiln in its green state.

Paper Clay: I mixed up my second batch of clay when Trudy Golley was the 'Artist in Residence' and was demonstrating the technical properties of 'Paper Clay' - naturally, I experimented by adding Cellulose Fibre to that batch. The paper made a huge difference by lightening the clay and strengthening the work in its green state / thereby reducing the risk of damaging the sharp edges where sections of work were joined together. The Cellulose Fibre, like the Grog, reduced the shrinkage so that it was not necessary to add as much Grog to the clay. Another aspect of the Cellulose Fibre which was advantageous, was that it added plasticity to the clay body and reduced the amount of water I had to add to the mixture; this helped to reduce the weight of the clay as well as the 'wet to dry' shrinkage rate.

Finally I began to add Perlite to the clay, which not only functioned as a Grog, but served to make it even lighter. My clay body mixture was approximately:

Reclaim Clay	-	50% by volume
Cellulose Fibre	-	25% by volume
Perlite	-	15% by volume
16/60 Grog	-	10% by volume

Firing and Surface Treatment:

I chose to Blackfire my pieces with Copper Glazes, as this method of firing produces dramatic effects, adding to the visual impact of my work. The surfaces produced by this method have an ancient appearance, not unlike corroded bronzes and the iridescent colours of glass ware found on sunken Merchant ships. Tony Flynn described one of my pieces in this way:- "it looks like it's been dragged up from the Aegean and had the coral blasted off it". I liked this analogy, as this is the effect I wish to achieve.

References and Influences

As mentioned in my work proposal, I have been influenced by such artists as:

Bruce Beasley
Rodchenko
Kazimir Malévich

More recently I have been influenced by the work of Hideo Matsumoto, who was artist in residence in the C.S.A. Ceramics workshop in 1996. I believe his work and mine both attempt to express a 'machine' aesthetic. although we are both quite different in our approach.

During the C.S.A excursion to Japan (20 September - 7 October 1996) I was exposed to a very different environment and approach to the medium of clay, which was both refreshing and inspiring. Seeing the work in Japan inspired me to do more with my own work, which I felt was crude in comparison to much of the work I saw there.

Some of my other (non specific) sources of inspiration are:

- * Construction Sites
- * Archaeological Sites
- * Industrial Areas
- * Natural Geographic formations such as erosion.

Construction sites and machinery have been a constant source of inspiration to me since I began the early prototypes for this body of work in 1994. It was then that my work moved away from its earlier (undergrad) classical style and took on an industrial influence. I attribute this change to the influence of my environment at that time.

In 1995 I was living and working in a rural area and was constantly surrounded by rusting machinery and derelict vehicles. It was not until recently however that I began to see their influence in my work. In 'Balance of Power' I used objects found in the area where I lived to give a machine like quality to the work.

Literary Influences:

My reading, as an influence, has been as significant to me as the visual information which surrounds me on a daily basis. My ideas have been profoundly influenced by the writing of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche in:

Thus spoke Zarathustra
Human, all, too human.
Beyond Good and Evil.
Twilight of the Idols / The Anti-Christ.
Ecce Homo

Nietzsche has been a constant source of inspiration to me and has been invaluable as a reinforcement to my own ideas, particularly in the case of Christianity, a subject he deals with thoroughly in 'Thus spoke Zarathustra', 'Twilight of the Idols' and 'The Anti-Christ'. The three writers: Chekhov, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche all have a profound insight into human nature and the difficult conditions of their time.

I related strongly to many of the ideas expressed in 'Voices of the First Day' (*Robert Lawlor*) which contained, among other things, his opinion of the destructive aspects of Western Culture and Christianity. It is not surprising that I saw in him a 'Kindred Spirit'.

Other less specific influences are authors such as:

Kobo Abé
Vladimir Nabokov
Haruki Murakami

CONCLUSION

I envisage these pieces as indoor works, perhaps in public spaces or in the foyers of large buildings. I have achieved many of my aims this year, both technically and aesthetically, and have begun to envisage a new body of work which will further explore my ideas of Western Culture and Christianity. I would like to continue making large scale works as I feel that the scale is an integral part of the ideas I wish to express. Making my work on a large scale also gave me the opportunity to explore detail, which is difficult to achieve on a small scale.

As my work progressed, so too did my concepts, so that I could not, with conviction, sum up all my work in a single brief statement. Ideally, each piece should have its own statement; I have done this to some extent in this report by writing a brief explanation of each piece.

EPILOGUE

A journeyman sailed the sea 'Humanity',
and at the journey's end he came to an Island
called 'Self'.

Far over it's dunes and rocks he wandered,
and discovered many things; but in the island's
centre a great expanse of water barred his way.
"What is this?", he cried.

"I have laboured long upon the perilous sea,
and at the journey's end I discover.....what?

.....Another sea to sail?"

At this he fell into a reverie and gazed
thoughtfully over the water. In the distance,
over the dunes, the waves of 'humanity'
thundered onto the shore.....

.....As if in answer.

Footnotes

- (i) Friedrich Nietzsche Human, All Too Human. Penguin books London England (this translation) Published 1994, p:239.
- (ii) Robert Lawlor Voices Of The First Day-Awakening In The Aboriginal Dreamtime. Inner Traditions Ltd, One Park Street, Rochester, Vermont 05767. 1991 p:58.
- (iii) Andrew Bard Schmookler Voices Of The First Day-Awakening In The Aboriginal Dreamtime. Inner Traditions Ltd. One Park Street, Rochester, Vermont 05767. 1991 p:57 (from: Schmookler: 'The Parable of the Tribes').
- (iv) Friedrich Nietzsche Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Penguin Books London England (this translation) 1961 p:178
- (v) Kobo Abé The Face Of Another. Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth England (this translation) 1966 p:53
- (vi) Friedrich Nietzsche Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Penguin Books London England (this translation) 196 p:137.

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One Park Street, Rochester, Vermont 05767.
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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

- 1997 Candidate for Graduate Diploma of Art
 ANU Canberra School of Art
- 1993 Bachelor of Arts (Visual)
 ANU Canberra School of Art

Exhibitions

- 1992 501, Strathnairn Gallery, Canberra
- 1993 *Scratching the Surface*, Ceramics Workshop,
 ANU Canberra School of Art
- Interval*, ANU Canberra School of Art Gallery

Residencies

- 1992 Artist in Residence, Canberra Grammar School

Awards

- 1989 Tumut Art Show, second prize